

USU Extension Launches AG Wellness Programs to Address Mental Health Needs in Agriculture

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Utah State University Extension recently launched Ag Wellness, a program focused on addressing the mental health needs of Utah farmers, ranchers and others involved in the agricultural industry.

The Ag Wellness program includes resources, online and in-person courses and a podcast aimed at improving mental health and helping farmers and ranchers live happy, fulfilled, productive lives.

Farmers and others who work in the agricultural field face unique mental health challenges, particularly after the difficult farming year due to drought and COVID-19.

“We are working to create a network of people who can help – from Extension agents to Farm Bureau and UDAF workers, to FFA club leaders and 4-H youth,” said Tasha Howard, USU Extension assistant professor. “The goal is to create a network of friends, family and neighbors who can recognize the signs and symptoms of a mental health issue and connect the person to the resources that can best help.”

Two courses will be hosted online through USU Extension – Mental Health Awareness and Advocacy for Ag (MHAA-Ag) and ACT for Ag.

The MHAA-Ag course teaches participants to identify those who may be struggling with their mental health, locate high quality resources that can help, then connect them in a supportive way. The course has been taught

multiple times in various formats and for different populations. It has been shown to increase mental health literacy and improve participants’ abilities to support someone who needs access to mental health resources.

ACT for Ag is a course that teaches farmers, ranchers and rural Utahns how to deal with the unique stressors they face. This interactive course takes principles from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and turns them into actionable tasks so course participants can improve their own mental health in a self-paced course.

The Ag Wellness podcast supplements the material taught in both courses by sharing real-life stories from farmers and ranchers across the state. The first episode of the podcast launched on Friday, Oct. 1. Subsequent episodes will continue to discuss the importance of being able to help those who may be struggling in addition to taking care of their own personal mental health.

“Being a part of the Ag Wellness team has afforded me the opportunity to learn and teach important mental health first aid skills,” said Josh Dallin, USU Extension assistant professor. “And I never would have thought the need to use these tools would hit so close to home. I am certain the things I learned helped, in part, to save the life of someone I love very much. I believe everyone should take the time to become familiar with these same tools. You never know when and how these might come into play to help you save the lives of those you care about.”

The Ag Wellness program was made possible by a grant from the Western Regional Agricultural Stress Assistance Program.

To learn more about Extension Ag Wellness programs, visit <https://www.facebook.com/usuextensionagwellness/>.

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